

CHELYDRA OSCEOLA STEJNEGER, 1918 (REPTILIA,
TESTUDINES): PROPOSED CONSERVATION BY USE OF
THE PLENARY POWERS. Z.N.(S.)2282

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In 1918 Stejneger described and named a taxon of snapping turtles from peninsular Florida as *Chelydra osceola*. Since then the name has with rare exceptions been accepted in dozens of works as valid at the specific or subspecific level; repeated revisionary studies have demonstrated its validity beyond doubt (Richmond, 1958; Feuer, 1971; Medem, 1977, are the most outstanding examples). The name has been popularised in very widely-used handbooks adopted not only by the general public but as required texts in college and high school courses (Conant, 1958 and 1975, and Blair *et al.*, 1957 and 1968, are the most conspicuous examples). The several guides to the fauna of Florida have also made the name widely known among biologists of the state (e.g., Carr & Goin, 1955; Carr, 1940). Other widely popular books on turtles in particular (e.g. Carr, 1952; Ernst & Barbour, 1972; Pritchard, 1967) use the name.

2. At a different level, within primarily the realm of herpetological specialists, the name has been firmly established by the widely-respected, authoritative checklists of the North American herpetofauna (Stejneger & Barbour, 1923, 1933, 1939, 1943; Schmidt, 1953) and of the turtles of the world (Mertens & Wermuth, 1955; Wermuth & Mertens, 1961, 1977). In addition to these broadly synoptic, highly influential works a dozen or two more specialised accounts of *osceola* have appeared in the literature; a perusal of the last 56 issues of the *Zoological Record* (1924–1979) reveals 12 citations, and certainly more exist.

3. It is thus clearly evident that the name *osceola* has been deeply entrenched in the literature for over 50 years and should therefore not be permitted to be changed for any except the most compelling reasons.

4. A serious threat to this history of nomenclatural stability does exist, however, in the form of two names proposed by Hay in 1916 for Pleistocene fossils from Florida: *Chelydra laticarinata* and *Chelydra sculpta*. Both antedate Stejneger's *Chelydra osceola* (1918) and have been concluded in all probability to be synonymous with it by Richmond (1958), Feuer (1971) and Mlynarski (1976), among others. All these authors have refrained from making the nomenclatural change resulting from that conclusion, however, partly because of reluctance to

disturb the long-established stability of the name *osceola*, and partly because of the uncertainty of definitive allocation inherent in nomenclatural disposition of poorly representative fossils in the context of an extant fauna.

5. Nevertheless the threat to the security of *Chelydra osceola* Stejneger remains despite the admirable constraint exercised by these particular authors. Yet the names for Hay's fossils have seldom been used—very likely not more than a couple of dozen times.

6. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is therefore asked:

- (1) to use the plenary powers to rule that the specific name *osceola*, as published in the combination *Chelydra osceola* Stejneger, 1918, is to be given nomenclatural precedence over the following specific names whenever either of them is considered to be a synonym of it: *laticarinata* Hay, 1916 and *sculpta* Hay, 1916, both published in binomina with *Chelydra* Schweigger, 1812;
- (2) to place the specific name *osceola* Stejneger, 1918, as published in the binomen *Chelydra osceola* Stejneger, 1918, on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology, with an endorsement that it is to be given precedence over *laticarinata* Hay, 1916 and *sculpta* Hay, 1916, both published in binomina with *Chelydra* Schweigger, 1812, whenever it is considered to be a synonym of either of them.
- (3) to place the specific names (a) *laticarinata* Hay, 1916 and (b) *sculpta* Hay, 1916, as published in combination with the generic name *Chelydra* Schweigger, 1812, on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology with endorsements that neither is to be given priority over *Chelydra osceola* Stejneger, 1918 when it is considered to be a synonym of that name.

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